

VZCZCXR07113
RR RUEHAO
DE RUEHAO #0040 1381540
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 181540Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL CURACAO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2272
INFO RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0281
RHMFIUU/DAVIS MONTAN AFB AZ
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RHMFIUU/JIATF SOUTH
RUEABND/DEA SAN JUAN PR
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHDC
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0424
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 3280

UNCLAS CURACAO 000040

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR FOR CA AND WHA\CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [NA](#) [AA](#) [NL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [MARR](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: SLIM "YES" WIN IN MAY 15 REFERENDUM SHOWS DIVIDED ISLAND

REF: A) CURACAO 000012; B) CURACAO 000032; C) CURACAO 000038

¶1. (U) NARROW MARGIN OF VICTORY: According to preliminary results, the "YES" vote won Friday's referendum with 52 percent of the vote compared to 48 percent for "NO", a narrow margin reflecting divided support for the Netherlands Antilles dissolution agreement (reflets). Turnout was higher than last election, with over 10,000 more votes cast. 41,398 voted "YES" and 38,363 voted "NO". This is almost the same margin as the 2007 parliamentary elections (51 to 49 percent). The vote was peaceful and orderly with no significant incidents. Island Governor Lisa Dindial said the final official results will be announced on Wednesday, 20 May 2009.

¶2. (U) Antilles Prime Minister Emily de Jongh-Elhage said that the voters have made their decision and the governing coalition will move forward with dissolution as planned. She acknowledged that steps must be taken to reach a broader consensus on how to proceed. With \$1.7 billion in debt relief assured by a "YES" win, the coalition had expected a larger victory, despite recent indications that the race was tightening. Opposition MAN party leader Charles Cooper said that he respects the vote, "but you can not ignore 48 percent of the voters and we believe the (dissolution) process must be stopped."

¶3. (U) Local media report that Dutch State Secretary for Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld said the process will continue and that the opposition should accept PM De Jongh-Elhage's offer to "harmonize." Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende is quoted as welcoming the referendum outcome and said he is pleased that the dissolution can continue.

¶4. (U) OPPOSITION PLAYS UP RACE AND ETHNICITY: Opposition Leader Cooper said that votes by Dutch and "immigrants" made the difference and asked "should they be able to decide the future of our people?" Cooper also cited the "YES" spending advantage (estimated 1.9 million USD vs. 900,000) as a key factor. Nelson Navarro of the opposition FK party said "we lost to the capitalists who scared people with a jobless future." An overwhelming majority of business leaders and "European Dutch whites" supported "YES", while the majority of descendants of less advantaged Curacao families voted "NO".

¶5. (SBU) "YES" campaigners claim to have seen people being paid about \$30 each to vote against the referendum, and wonder where the Opposition got its funding (comment: most suspect from Venezuela. End comment) They admit, however, that the governing coalition's positive message did not penetrate to all sectors of society. They recognize that they will need to show benefits to people's lives directly if they hope to win the next election. Various sources also noted that there have been no incidents reported regarding the Smartmatic voting machines (ref. C), but

that they are still checking the paper ballots against the electronic results. All sides seem to agree that, overall, the process was free, transparent and democratic.

¶6. (U) DISSOLUTION DELAY POSSIBLE: In reaction to Curacao's referendum, Dutch State Secretary Bijleveld-Schouten has reportedly suggested moving the dissolution date back one year to January 2011. PM De Jongh-Elhage wants to continue with the January 2010 target date. Early indications are that one more round of Antilles Parliament elections might be required, possibly in January 2010, to bridge the gap to whatever date is determined for final dissolution. The timing depends in part on the ability of the relevant legislative bodies to approve the needed legislation.

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